

# *Strauss on Aristophanes'*

## *The Frogs*

### Βάτραχοι



The *Frogs* is the only Aristophanean comedy at the beginning of which we see and hear a god. It is the only Aristophanean comedy the action of which proceeds from the design of a god. It differs from all plays hitherto discussed by the fact that it opens with a dialogue between a master and a slave. The master is Dionysos himself, the god of the theater. His slave Xanthias asks him whether he should say one of the things at which the spectators customarily laugh. Dionysos leaves him full freedom except that of using expressions that disgust Dionysos. His prohibition reminds us of the distinction between vulgar and Aristophanean comedy that we know from some of the parabaseis; Dionysos states the preference ordinarily stated by Aristophanes himself. After all, Aristophanes has been bred by Dionysos (*Clouds* 519). The *Frogs* is surely the only comedy that opens with the question, what should a character in the play do with a view to making the audience laugh? This means that the *Frogs* is the only comedy that does not simply open with a complaint or with moaning. Yet Xanthias is eager to make jokes because he wishes relief from the pain caused by the luggage that he is carrying, although he carries the burden while riding on a donkey, whereas his gentle master walks. Xanthias complains about the soreness of his shoulder. It is not necessary for our purpose to follow Dionysos, who wonders how Xanthias can be carrying something since he himself is carried, and, after this difficulty is disposed of, why since Xanthias denies that he derives any help from being carried by the donkey, he does not in his turn carry the donkey. Dionysos is a better arguer than Xanthias, just as he has a better taste than he; he deserves to be the master. It is more important for us to realize that in the beginning of the *Frogs* the complaint is not absent, but as it were subordinated to joking or laughter as the relief for complaint. Laughing presupposes suffering, while the reverse is not true. At any rate

Dionysos, who at the beginning appears to be concerned with the right kind of comedy, soon proves to be concerned above all with the right kind of tragedy.

Dionysos commands Xanthias to get off the donkey, not in order to carry it, but because they have arrived at the god's first destination, the house of Herakles. Dionysos, clothed in a lion's skin and carrying a big club, knocks savagely at the door, which is opened by Herakles himself, who apparently has no servant; in contradistinction to Euripides and to Socrates in the corresponding scenes of the *Acharnians* and the *Clouds* respectively, he surely is not occupied. Contrary to Dionysos' expectation, which is not shared by Xanthias, Herakles is not frightened by his half brother's appearance but only incited by it to unquenchable laughter, for when dressing up for the role of Herakles, Dionysos had forgotten to take off his womanish garments. Dionysos obviously did not come to Herakles, as Dikaiopolis came to Euripides and as Euripides came to Agathon, in order to borrow a disguise; the god of the theater possesses all kinds of disguises. When Herakles asks him where on earth he has traveled in his ridiculous outfit, Dionysos replies that he has taken part in the naval battle of the Arginusai: A man or a god who lays claim to Heraklean prowess must have been able to do what many Athenian citizens and even slaves had done. His pretense to martial glory, as well as some other characteristics that he possesses, foreshadow Falstaff. The god of the theater is at the opposite pole from the fighter Herakles. Although the character responsible for the action of the *Frogs* is a god, he complies with Aristophanes' rule that characters who perform this function in his plays must be Athenian citizens. As he tells Herakles, while he was on a man-of-war on the way to the Arginusai or back, he read Euripides' *Andromeda*, and his heart became filled with an unsayably strong desire for the dead poet: No human being (and in particular not Herakles) can dissuade him from descending to Hades in order to bring Euripides back, for the poets who are still alive are bad. Herakles, for whose understanding Dionysos has a good-natured contempt, does not approve of his brother's liking for Euripides. He asks him why he does not try to bring back Sophocles from Hades rather than Euripides: The bringing back of Aeschylus is not even considered. Dionysos' decisive reason in favor of Euripides and against Sophocles is that one must be a scoundrel like Euripides in order to try to run away from the place where one belongs and, in particular, if one is dead, from Hades, but Sophocles was even-tempered (and hence content and just) here and is even-tempered (and

hence content and just) there. Herakles draws Dionysos' attention to some other tragic poets; among them is Agathon whom Dionysos, the admirer of Euripides, also admires, but even he is not comparable in his view to Euripides. According to Dionysos one can no longer find a naturally fertile poet who is able to utter risky expressions like "the foot of time," which Dionysos is crazy about and which Herakles rejects as altogether bad. One is tempted to think that Herakles, who cuts such a poor figure in the *Birds*, is sobriety itself when confronted with Dionysos' infatuation, just as Chairephon appeared to be on the side of law and order in the *Wasps* when confronted with the final madness of Philokleon. In Dionysos' view Herakles, being concerned with nothing but food, understands nothing of poetry. He therefore turns to the purpose of his visit. Having decided to descend to Hades, he needs Herakles' guidance because he is wholly unfamiliar with Hades: There is no truth whatsoever in Heraclitus' saying that Dionysos and Hades are the same.<sup>82</sup> Dionysos needs Herakles' guidance more particularly because of his softness or love of comfort; he wishes to know the most pleasant way down as well as about the hosts in Hades of whom the hero had made use when he had gone down to fetch Kerberos; he has provided himself with a lion's skin and a big club in order to be regarded and treated as Herakles while down there. His softness also explains why he needs the company of Xanthias; he needs quite a bit of luggage and hence a carrier of it. One wonders whether it is not his softness that underlies his love of Euripides. Herakles is shocked by his mad daring, but Dionysos' mind is made up; so great is his love of the theater that all his cowardice is powerless against it. While Herakles had gone down to Hades to fetch Kerberos because he was compelled to do so, Dionysos goes down to Hades in order to fetch Euripides because he loves Euripides' poetry. Dionysos refuses to consider any of the three kinds of suicide that Herakles proposes to him as ways to Hades, for he wishes to return. He is eager to learn from Herakles the way by which he had gone down, because Herakles has come back. Herakles gives him a gruesome description of the large and abysmally deep lake that one has to cross on Charon's tiny boat, of the innumerable snakes and other most terrible beasts, and the mass of foul mire and ever-flowing sewage in which the most unjust people (among them mother-beaters, but not Euripides) are thrown. Yet Dionysos is not afraid. Does he not believe in the terrors of Hades? He surely expects to find every kind of comfort on his journey. Although Herakles is reticent about the reception that he was given in Hades, he is truthful enough to add that Dionysos

will see, after he has passed the terrors, in a most beautiful light like that of the sun, blessed groups of initiated men and women who will tell him everything he might need to know, for they dwell near the gates of Pluton. After having said this much, Herakles bids Dionysos good-bye without making any further attempt to dissuade him from his journey. He did not ask him why he wished to look like Herakles in Hades. We suggest this explanation of this strange wish. Dionysos does not wish to be recognized in order to be able to see Euripides; he believes that he must steal Euripides just as Herakles had stolen Kerberos, because he expects that the gods below are anxious to keep the best poet; Herakles might be suspected of anything, but surely not of stealing Euripides; the Heraklean appearance is the only one that can not possibly arouse in Hades the suspicion that its wearer is after a poet.

Xanthias was of course excluded from the exchange between Dionysos and Herakles, but he did not accept that exclusion as a matter of course. Three times he complained that no attention was paid to him; after all, his shoulder still aches. He is accustomed to his master's paying attention to him; Dionysos is an easygoing, if not kind master, who lives with his slave on a footing of equality. He accedes at once to Xanthias' request that he leave him on earth and in his stead hire as porter a corpse, which as such is on its way to Hades. Dionysos sensibly refuses to pay the exorbitant sum demanded by the corpse, which is just being carried out, and only then does the sensible Xanthias declare that he is willing to carry the luggage to Hades. The relation of Dionysos and Xanthias resembles that of friends, rather than that of master and slave. Besides, not the terrors of Hades but the soreness of his shoulder had induced Xanthias to consider allowing his master to descend without him.

Dionysos and Xanthias arrive at the lake to be crossed on Charon's boat. Charon does not allow Xanthias on his boat, since he is a slave according to Athenian law, for he did not participate in the naval battle, as he truthfully admits; unlike his master he does not lie. The poor fellow is compelled to walk around the lake while carrying the luggage; it looks as if the difference between free men and slaves will be as important in Hades as it is on earth. At Charon's rude command Dionysos must row, despite his complete lack of naval experience. Charon comforts him by saying that the work will be made easy by a song of the chorus of frogs, which they will soon hear. The frogs sing of the beauty of the song that they chanted in honor of Dionysos on the occasion of the Athenian festival dedicated to that son of Zeus. They are not aware that the god is now

listening to their singing; they recognize Dionysos as little as Charon did, but unlike Charon they are concerned with Dionysos. Dionysos loathes the frogs' music but they continue with it, claiming to be beloved by the Muses, Pan, and Apollon. While Dionysos' delicate ears suffer from the frogs' croaking, his delicate hands suffer from the rowing. When the frogs become aware of how much they annoy Dionysos, they annoy him on purpose. Thereupon Dionysos tries to silence them by outcroaking them, in which he succeeds. There is then a contest between the chorus and the individual responsible for the action of the play, a contest that ends with the victory of the "hero," as in the *Acharnians*, the *Wasps*, and the *Birds*. Yet in the *Frogs* the contest is not a contest through speech, nor does it occur in the center of the play. The conflict between the chorus and the hero in the *Frogs* is due merely to the failure of the chorus to recognize the hero. It is impossible to say whether that failure is caused by Dionysos' disguise. One may regard Dionysos' victory in the contest with the frogs as a good omen for his journey, but one must also say that we have only Dionysos' word for it that he defeated the frogs; the moment in which he claims to have defeated the frogs is the moment in which Charon's boat arrives at its destination, i.e., has left the region of the frogs.

When Dionysos and Xanthias meet on the far side of the lake, each claims to have seen the archcriminals of whom Herakles had spoken; but Dionysos at any rate had not given any sign of seeing them while he was rowing over the lake. He is surely uncertain now as to what they should do next. Xanthias suggests that they go on, since the place where they are, according to Herakles, is the region of the monstrous beasts. Yet, according to Herakles the place of the monstrous beasts is reached before the place of the archcriminals. Dionysos is now certain that Herakles has misinformed him about Hades, or more precisely that he has exaggerated the terrors of Hades in order both to frighten him (and thus to dissuade him from bringing back the hated Euripides) and to magnify his own descent to Hades. The only terror of Hades that Dionysos has experienced was the frogs, and those he overcame with ease. Entirely confident now, he is eager to meet a genuine monster of Hades. Xanthias obliges him by claiming to see the Empusa. Dionysos does not see it, either because it does not exist or because he is too frightened to see anything. He is so frightened that he urges his priest, who is sitting in the front row of the theater, to save him. He thus destroys the dramatic illusion without, however, becoming the spokesman for the poet (297; cf. 276). But the terror

—the only terror of Hades that frightened Dionysos—passes soon. The god is free to wonder which god has been trying to ruin him. Xanthias tells him in effect that the god in question is Dionysos' desire for Euripides, or that Euripides is a danger to Dionysos. This suggestion remains ineffectual, for in this moment master and slave hear the playing of flutes and see flaming torches: They have left the region of the terrors and entered the region of the blessed initiated. They step aside in order to watch the procession of the initiated, i.e., of the main chorus of the play. The *Frogs* is the only play that has two choruses, not confronting each other (like the chorus of men and the chorus of women in the *Lysistrata*), but succeeding each other. The play is not called after the main chorus but after the chorus of the frogs, which is never heard of again after its brief contest with Dionysos. The duality of choruses corresponds to the duality of the terrors of Hades and the bliss in Hades. The chorus of frogs takes the place of a possible chorus of the archcriminals of Hades, i.e., of the admirers of Euripides (771–80), which would not have been bearable since it would have been a chorus, a *demos*, of archcriminals that professes the principles of injustice and is not converted by punishment after death. The title of the play draws our attention to this possible impossibility.

The procession of the initiates in Hades, who are of course still Athenians, imitates the procession to Eleusis of the living. They invoke Iakchos, whose relation to Dionysos they leave in the dark, to join them in their sacred and gay dance. They send away the uninitiated, i.e., the a-Music and the politically criminal; in this context they mention Dionysos with reference to comedy; they refer three times to comedy, but never to tragedy. This is in agreement with the festival that they imitate, inasmuch as mockery forms no mean part of it. Yet the initiates are as unaware of the presence of Dionysos (to say nothing of his design) as were the frogs, who also in a manner imitated a celebration in honor of Dionysos. As a rule, the songs and speeches with which the chorus makes its entry in an Aristophanean play are in strict accordance with the dramatic function of the chorus—the chorus of the *Acharnians* acts as the old Acharnians pursuing the traitor Dikaïopolis, etc.—and do not present the chorus as comical chorus. In the *Frogs*, however, the chorus presents itself in the parodos not only as the chorus of Demeter (384–86) but also as the chorus of the play, eager to win in the contest of comedies (392–93). The chorus of the initiates shows tacitly that Dionysos is highly honored in Hades and that he would have been well received there, regardless of whether he is the Dionysos of Aristophanes, who is a civilized Athenian, or the Dionysos of

Euripides' *Bakchai*, who is worshiped above all by the barbarians and belongs together with Demeter (while Aristophanes' Dionysos does not meet Demeter's daughter even when he is in Hades). When Dionysos and Xanthias make their presence, although not their identity, known to the chorus, it asks them whether they do not wish to join in mocking certain Athenian citizens (416 ff.), i.e., in doing the work of Dionysos. Dionysos would not have run any risk in descending to Hades as Dionysos. His disguising himself as Herakles thus appears to be entirely unnecessary. For, assuming that the powers below wish to keep Euripides by all means, he could have made stealthy arrangements with the poet and run away with him at the opportune moment, even if he had appeared as Dionysos.

Immediately after the chorus has lampooned three Athenians, Dionysos asks it for guidance toward the dwelling of Pluton, without referring at all to the themes touched on in the parodos. He learns that he has arrived at the gate of Hades. The chorus continues its celebration of Demeter or Persephone and praises the bliss reserved for those who have been initiated and led a pious life. Being altogether alien to the ways of Hades, Dionysos does not know how he should knock at the gate of Hades. Xanthias advises him to do it along the lines of Herakles, in whose guise he appears. He knocks accordingly at the gate, which is opened by Aiakos, to whom he introduces himself as Herakles. Thereupon Aiakos receives him as Hermes had received Trygaios in the *Peace*, pouring a flood of insults over his ears about his having run away with Kerberos: Now he will pay for it; all the terrors of Hades will be let loose on him. Aiakos mentions the well-known terrors of Hades about which Herakles had remained silent, perhaps because he had escaped them owing to his quick withdrawal. Dionysos is frightened as never before; while despising him as the greatest coward among gods and men, Xanthias comes to his help; Dionysos denies that he is cowardly, but admits that he is less brave than Xanthias, who is as little frightened by Aiakos' threats as he was by the Empusa. Being more quick-witted than his slave, and having realized that his descending to Hades in the guise of Herakles was not only unnecessary but a great blunder, he suggests to Xanthias that they exchange roles; Xanthias will take on the guise of Herakles and he himself that of the slave who carries the luggage. Xanthias, proud of this recognition of his prowess, gladly accepts the suggestion. Since Dionysos is accustomed to living with Xanthias on a footing of equality, the exchange of roles is not too surprising. Immediately thereafter they are confronted not by a terror of Hades but by a maid servant of Persephone, who comes out of the

house of the goddess in order to welcome Herakles to a big and delicious meal that Persephone prepared for him as soon as she heard of his return to Hades; the goddess obviously did not resent the theft of Kerberos. A most attractive flute girl and some dancing girls also wait for him indoors. Especially when he hears of the dancing girls Xanthias is highly pleased with this invitation and orders his slave Dionysos to follow him into the house with the luggage. Dionysos of course retracts the change of roles that he had arranged in different circumstances. In order to persuade Xanthias, he is compelled to tell him who solemnly protests that he can not be so insane and foolish as to believe that he, a slave and a mortal, is Herakles. Xanthias obeys. He comforts himself with the thought that Dionysos might live to regret his change of mind and role. The chorus, which still does not know the identity of Dionysos, praises him as a most versatile man (533, 540), a man like Theramenes the turncoat, who in each situation chooses the softer alternative. Dionysos entirely concurs in this praise. This is as it should be: Dionysos admires Euripides, and Theramenes is a disciple of Euripides (967-70). Dionysos is somehow akin to Euripides.

Yet he has not yet encountered the true terrors of Hades. He was saved from the wrath of Aiakos by the intervention of Persephone. Now other low-class inhabitants of Hades take up the business that Aiakos had left unfinished. Two hostesses recognize Dionysos as Herakles, the scoundrel who once upon a time had eaten enormous amounts of food in their establishment and when asked to pay for it had refused to do so and threatened the two women with his sword; now he will pay for his misdeeds; Kleon will be called in, who will bring him to justice this very day. Xanthias is pleased with Dionysos' being so speedily punished for having deprived him of the role of Herakles and confirms the two hostesses in their desire for the punishment of the apparent Herakles. Dionysos, who is again greatly frightened and for this reason, to say nothing of others, does not respond to the women's scolding in kind, is now again most eager to play Xanthias, while he wishes Xanthias again to take on the role of Herakles. Going to the extremes of repentance and self-abasement and swearing most solemnly that he will never again take the role of Herakles from Xanthias, he induces his slave to become Herakles again. The chorus urges Xanthias to act the part of the god Herakles. It sides with Xanthias, or rather with the god against the hostesses. The hostesses' recognizing Dionysos as Herakles has made the chorus certain that Xanthias is not Herakles, although it had ample occasion to observe Dionysos' very un-

Heraklean cowardice; it trusts the hostesses' judgment more than its own eyes, or, if you wish, it is deceived by Dionysos' disguise. It does not praise Xanthias as it had praised Dionysos for his versatility in the parallel strophe; it is aware of Dionysos' superiority.

Dionysos' action seems to be all the wiser since the punishment threatening Herakles proves to be extrajudicial, for Kleon obeys the hostesses' call as little as he had obeyed the call of the wasps. Aiakos appears with some slaves whom he commands to fetter Xanthias-Herakles. Imitating Herakles, Xanthias prepares himself for a fight, but is easily overcome by Aiakos' helpers. Partly from fear and partly from the desire to avenge himself on Xanthias, Dionysos expresses his approval of Xanthias-Herakles' being punished for Herakles' misdeeds. Xanthias in turn avenges himself on Dionysos by denying to Aiakos that he has ever been in Hades before and by asking him to put his slave (Dionysos) to the severest tortures in order to find out the truth. This is too much for Dionysos; he now truthfully declares that he is Dionysos, the son of Zeus, while the alleged Herakles is his slave. Xanthias does not leave matters at denying Dionysos' assertion; he demands that Dionysos be whipped all the more, since if he is a god he will not feel it. Dionysos turns the tables on Xanthias: Since Xanthias too claims to be a god by claiming to be Herakles, he must receive as many beatings as Dionysos himself. Xanthias admits that Dionysos' proposal is fair: By whipping both of them Aiakos will see which of the two is not a god; the one who cries out first when whipped is not a god. Dionysos' proposal is to his interest, since being whipped is preferable to other kinds of torture, and that proposal as restated by Xanthias is acceptable to Xanthias since the hardened slave is likely to be less sensitive to pain than the soft Dionysos. What will be tested in accordance with Xanthias' proposal is not strictly speaking insensitivity to whipping, but the degree of such insensitivity; gods differ from men not in kind but in degree. Sensitivity to pain is akin to vulnerability, which in its turn is related to mortality. We may recall here what happened to the gods' immortality in the *Birds* (see above, p. 188). Aiakos praises Xanthias for his fairness; it is not clear whether he regards him as Herakles; he surely regards him as a mortal (640, 652), i.e., as the one whose fraud will be discovered by the whipping. Seduced by Xanthias, Aiakos assumes that one of the two is a god; he either reasons that if two beings claim to be gods while either of them denies that the other is a god, one of them must be a god, or else he knows that one of the two beings with which he has to deal is Herakles. However this may be, the whipping contest proves to

be inconclusive; if not succumbing to pain when whipped is a sign of divinity, Xanthias is at least as much a god as Dionysos. Certainly Aiakos, who prior to the whipping contest was certain that Xanthias is a human being, is no longer certain of it after that contest. He therefore commands the two contestants for divinity to enter the house so that Pluton and Persephone, being gods themselves, can decide which of the two is a god. He acts on the assumption that no being known as a god to other gods can be a mortal in the guise of a god, just as in the *Thesmophoriazusai* the women acted on the assumption that no being known as a woman to the other women can be a man disguised as a woman (see above, p. 224). This could be thought to imply that only gods can know whether a given being is or is not a god, or that human beings as such can not know gods; *deus est quem dei deum esse declarant*. (This obviously leads to the further question of the veracity of the presumed or genuine gods.) Dionysos responds to Aiakos' final command with the remark that Aiakos should have thought of entrusting the decision to Pluton and Persephone before he whipped them. This remark shows not merely that Dionysos was not insensitive to the whipping, but above all that Dionysos himself did not think of the only true touchstone of divinity. One can not say that he was eager to conceal at all costs his being Dionysos, for he had revealed his identity to Aiakos prior to the whipping.

This much is clear: Dionysos lacks forethought. He had shown this sufficiently by his decision to descend to Hades in the guise of Herakles, a decision that led to his being whipped like a slave. This prompts us to wonder whether what induced him to descend at all to Hades—his desire to bring back Euripides—is not a consequence of the same defect: Could the stupid glutton Herakles, who loathes Euripides, be a better judge of tragedies than the god of the theater himself? Is Heraklean prowess, even if accompanied by stupidity and gluttony, not a better guide even regarding Music things than the softness of a playboy, which is characteristic of Dionysos and which underlies in particular his love for the "radical" poet Euripides? In trying to bring back Euripides, the enemy of the gods, he attempted without knowing it to free men from awe of the gods. His favoring of Euripides is about as reasonable as the favoring of the *philosophes* by a part of the French nobility prior to the French Revolution. Dionysos is enabled to indulge his soft habits by what we may call his social position. That position becomes most obviously questioned in the whipping contest, which renders his divinity wholly questionable. Euripides questioned the divinity of all commonly accepted gods (889-94;

*Thesmoph.* 451). Dionysos receives through his whipping the first inkling of the damage that Euripides' impiety does to his kind and hence to him, and he learns through the inconclusive character of the whipping contest that he depends on his fellow gods for his salvation: He receives a political lesson. We must wonder then whether the troubles that Dionysos gets into on account of his love for Euripides will not cure him of that love. Certain it is that Dionysos' cleverness and rascality is no match for the cleverness and rascality of Euripides as we know it from the *Thesmophoriazusai*. This inferiority must be taken into account when one judges Dionysos' cure of his love for Euripides—a cure that is at least partly the consequence of his foolish decision to descend to Hades in the guise of Herakles.

While the gods pass judgment indoors on the divinity of Dionysos and Xanthias, the chorus stages the parabasis. The parabasis of the *Frogs*, as distinguished from the parabaseis of the other plays, consists of all parts of the normal parabasis except the parabasis proper. The parabasis proper is the customary place in which the chorus speaks to the audience about the poet. The parabasis of the *Frogs* is as silent about the poet as the parabaseis of the three preceding plays. It differs from the parabaseis of all other plays by being silent about the chorus, i.e., about the initiates as such. While it begins with an invocation of the Muse, it is silent not only about the other gods but about the things of the Muses. The parabasis of the *Frogs* is strictly political; the chorus calls itself sacred (675, 686). This peculiarity of the parabasis of the play must be seen in the light of the unique emphasis in the parodos of the *Frogs* on things Music. The chorus imitates or anticipates the movement that takes place in the soul of Dionysos. In studying the *Lysistrata* and the *Thesmophoriazusai* one can observe a kind of atrophy of the parabaseis accompanying an atrophy of the need for a spokesman of the poet. This phenomenon has different reasons in the two plays: The *Lysistrata* is extraordinarily political and the *Thesmophoriazusai* is extraordinarily transpolitical; it remains to be seen what the reason is for the relative atrophy of the parabasis in the *Frogs*. The chorus, which as a matter of course has taken the side of the alleged Herakles against the two hostesses, advises the city to practice equality and hence in particular to be generous toward those who were involved in oligarchic errands, as well as toward all those who have fought in the navy for Athens. It blames the city for its unjust treatment of the gentlemen—the well-born, moderate, and just who were bred in palaestras, choruses, and music—the ancient coin as well as the new gold, which the city does

not use, while it uses the bad copper coins struck lately, i.e., strangers and low-class men descended from low-class men. Yet it explicitly refrains from promising success to the city if the city were to make use of the right sort of people.

We hear of the outcome of the important action that took place indoors during the parabasis through a conversation between Aiakos and Xanthias. Yet what we hear about that event is as insufficient as what we hear about the corresponding indoor events in the *Clouds*. Let us note here that the *Clouds* and the *Frogs* are the only plays in which the design that triggers the action remains wholly unfulfilled: Dionysos does not bring back Euripides, just as Strepsiades does not get rid of his debts. We learn from the conversation between Aiakos and Xanthias that Xanthias is now known to be a slave, but this does not necessarily mean that Dionysos has become known to be a god: Aiakos speaks of Dionysos as "a noble man" (737), i.e., applies to Dionysos an expression that he had applied to Xanthias prior to the whipping contest (640). Aiakos has come to admire Dionysos for his easygoing or kind treatment of his slave. It goes without saying that he and Xanthias look at Dionysos and masters in general from the point of view of slaves. We must not be too much impressed by Aiakos' failure to speak of Dionysos as a god; slaves may be the worst judges of divinity. Yet precisely if this is so, they are likely to be the worst judges of other kinds of excellence as well. Xanthias becomes aware of noisy railing indoors. He learns from Aiakos that it is Aeschylus and Euripides who are abusing each other. The reason is this: According to a law of Hades, the best craftsman in any of the grand and clever crafts is seated on a throne near to the throne of Pluton. In Hades, as distinguished from Athens, the highest goal of ambition is then pre-eminence in arts like tragedy. This is all the more remarkable since the rulers in Hades admittedly understand nothing of these arts (cf. 810-11). The throne of tragedy was hitherto occupied by Aeschylus, but when Euripides came down he showed off his tricks to the multitude of criminals who became enamored of him; puffed up with that applause he laid claim to the tragic throne. The *demos* in Hades shouted for a judgment as to which of the two tragedians is wiser in regard to their art. Aeschylus' partisans however are few, since the decent people are few, "just as here," as Aiakos says, destroying the dramatic illusion. Still, the *demos*, i.e., the scoundrels (779, 781), is not altogether depraved, since it is entirely willing to abide by the judgment of an arbiter. Yet the two slaves do not pay attention to such niceties; they detest the rabble as much as the gentlemen

do (cf. also 768), just as they have a Heraklean dislike for Euripides. Fortunately Hades is not a democracy; what will be done in regard to the tragic throne depends on Pluton; Pluton has decided that there will be a contest at once between the two tragedians. (Pluton's rulership may explain why the highest ambition in Hades is not political, or why there are no political contests there.) Since there is in Hades an authority independent of both the gentlemen and the *demos*, Xanthias reasonably wonders why the contest is limited to the favorite of the gentlemen on the one hand and the favorite of the *demos* on the other: Why did Sophocles not raise a claim to the tragic throne? He learns from Aiakos that when Sophocles came down to Hades, he accepted Aeschylus' supremacy gladly: He accepted his place in Hades with the same equanimity with which he accepted his being in Hades (80–82). Only if Aeschylus should lose the contest will Sophocles take up the fight against Euripides. Sophocles' posture toward Aeschylus resembles that of Xanthias toward Aiakos (cf. 788–89 with 754–55). Since Sophocles does not participate in the contest, he is not a character in the *Frogs*. Are we entitled to say that Sophocles is not fit to be a character in a comedy, whereas Aeschylus and Euripides are, since Aeschylus and Euripides stand for extremes that as such call for exaggerating imitation or for comical presentation, whereas Sophocles stands for the mean? Is tragedy in its highest form not subject to comical treatment, whereas comedy in its highest form is because of its essential extremism? Be this as it may, Euripides is at the opposite pole from Sophocles as far as self-assertion is concerned; he, and not Aeschylus, is responsible for the form that the contest of the tragedies will take, namely, the precise measuring and weighing of the tragedies of the two competing poets. The only difficulty is who should be the judge, for, as Aeschylus and Euripides agree, only few men are wise. By a stroke of good luck Dionysos has come down to Hades; both poets accept him as judge because of his experience in their art.

The contest of the tragedians is meant to decide "which of the two is wiser in regard to the art" (780). The whipping contest was meant to decide "which of the two is a god" (664). Just as the tragedies of Aeschylus and Euripides will be put to the test (802), Dionysos and Xanthias have been put to the test (642). Just as the impending contest will decide which of the two contestants is superior to the other in their art, the whipping contest was meant to decide which of the two contestants is superior to the other in insensitivity to pain. In trying to understand the later contest we must not forget the earlier one. We must also not forget that the

whipping contest was preceded by the contest between Dionysos and the frogs. Only in the central contest is Dionysos' identity—who he is and what he is—the theme, while in the first contest his identity is not even in question, and in the third contest it is known. Perhaps the first contest, but surely the second contest was inconclusive. By mentioning the first contest again we do not mean to ascribe to it an importance comparable to that of the two other contests. It is essential to the *Frogs* that it successively present a whipping contest and a music contest, just as it has two successive choruses.

The chorus describes the imminent fight between the two poets by contrasting in grand language the gigantic grandeur and fury of Aeschylus and the subtle sharp-tonguedness and envy of Euripides. On a loftier plane it puts forth the same preference as Herakles and the two slaves. Dionysos is the only character of the play (apart from Euripides himself) who prefers Euripides. Yet, as seems to be shown by the fact that Dionysos was acceptable as judge to the two poets, the god's point of view is not identical with that of the gentlemen, who unambiguously prefer Aeschylus, or with that of the rabble, who unambiguously prefer Euripides. Furthermore, as we ought not to forget, Dionysos had to pay dearly for his longing for Euripides. Finally, Dionysos was originally concerned not so much simply with the best tragic poet as with the best tragic poet who would be prepared to run away from Hades; this consideration excluded Sophocles, while Aeschylus was not even thought of. Sophocles was excluded from consideration because of his being even-tempered; yet Aeschylus is the opposite of even-tempered (cf. *Wasps* 883–84) and might therefore be perfectly willing to leave Hades. At any rate Dionysos is now compelled to make a choice between Aeschylus and Euripides regarding tragic excellence, wholly independently of whether Aeschylus is willing to return to the living. When he appears in the company of the two poets, he has just advised Euripides to abandon his claim to the tragic throne. In order to see why he did this, we must consider that he had explained to Pluton why he had come to Hades and that he had solemnly promised Euripides to bring him back to Athens (1411–14, 1469–70). Pluton could have regarded Dionysos' action as god-sent: Euripides' disappearance would put an end to the riotous propaganda against the established order, i.e., Aeschylus' supremacy. Yet Pluton was already committed to the contest between the two poets. He could escape his commitment without being charged with injustice by his noisy *demos* only if Euripides publicly withdrew from the contest. Thus he may have asked Dionysos to persuade Euripides to

abandon his claim. Yet this would have meant that Euripides tacitly recognized Aeschylus' pre-eminence, and this would have been unbearable for a man of Euripides' desire for distinction: There is no honor for tragedians in Athens that can be compared to the honor that may be awarded to them in Hades. It was entirely possible for Euripides to desire both to return to Athens and to be declared worthy of the tragic throne in Hades, for he knew that he would have to return to Hades sooner or later.

Aeschylus listens to Euripides' refusal to abandon his claim in contemptuous silence, which Euripides traces to his competitor's well-known pomposity. Euripides' insults eventually succeed in inducing Aeschylus to reply in kind. To Euripides' charge that his characters are savages, Aeschylus replies that Euripides' characters are beggars and cripples, not to say incestuous. Dionysos warns Euripides of Aeschylus' terrible rage (the god has compassion for Euripides), and he urges Aeschylus (whom he addresses as if he were a god) to control his anger: Poets must not behave like fishwives. Euripides declares himself willing to be the first to have his tragedies examined, however severely. Aeschylus, however, dislikes to compete with Euripides in Hades: His poetry is still alive among the living, while Euripides' poetry has gone down to Hades with him; yet in deference to the god he accepts Euripides' challenge. Dionysos thereupon commands the chorus to sing to the Muses because he wishes to pray that he may be able to judge of the contest in the most Music manner. The chorus naturally obeys, invoking the divine Muses to watch the coming contest regarding wisdom—a contest that will be conducted on both sides with the greatest power and cunning. Praying at the command of the judge, the chorus is now entirely impartial—as impartial as the Clouds were before the contest between the Just Speech and the Unjust Speech (*Clouds* 952–56).

Dionysos next commands the two poets to pray. Aeschylus obeys this command at once. He prays to Demeter, who has bred his mind, that he be worthy of her mysteries. Demeter is the goddess to which the chorus belongs. Euripides' hesitation to obey Dionysos' command is owing to the fact that he prays to "other gods," to gods of a different kind from those to whom Aeschylus and all others pray (with the exception of Socrates and his like), to gods peculiar to him; he prays to Ether, which nourishes him and which is the pivot of the tongue, as well as to Intelligence and Flair, that he may correctly refute the speeches with which he will have to take issue. Euripides' gods are not local or national, but universal or cos-

mic. His innovation regarding the gods does not induce the chorus to abandon its impartiality. After all, what is expected of poets is innovation or originality.

Without being asked to do so, Euripides opens the debate. Aeschylus is now silent like his Achilles and his Niobe (832, 911–13), whereas when the poets were asked to pray, Aeschylus was the first to speak without being asked to begin. Furthermore, Euripides opens the debate because he does not intend to argue, as the Unjust Speech did (*Clouds* 940–44), from the premises of his opponent. There is no common ground between him, the worshiper of Ether, and Aeschylus, the worshiper of Demeter. The fact that the disagreement between the two poets regarding the gods comes into the open during the prayer scene explains sufficiently why Euripides does not limit himself, as he originally intended (862–64), to discussing the poetic and technical qualities of the two poets' tragedies. Aeschylus is in his view a boaster, aiming at overawing his simple-minded audience by deliberate obscurity—for instance, by the protracted silences of his heroes and the use of novel and obscure words of oxlike size. Euripides, whose critique of Aeschylus reminds us of Pheidippides' critique of that poet (*Clouds* 1366–67), stands for clarity, straightforwardness, and rationality. Hence his use of the prologue and the democratic character of his plays.<sup>83</sup> When Dionysos advises him, the teacher of Theramenes, not to make too much of his democratism, the poet refers to the fact that he has taught the audience—the audience of the *Frogs* (954, 972)—to talk, to think, to see, to long and desire, to understand, to argue, and to be suspicious by bringing in domestic subjects with which men are familiar and that they understand, so that they can judge of the wisdom of what the poet does (cf. *Wasps* 1179–80): He broke with Aeschylus' habit of stupefying the audience by bringing in subjects beyond its experience. He made the Athenians acquire the habits of thinking, distinguishing, and raising questions, especially regarding affairs of the household.<sup>84</sup> The justice of this claim is strongly confirmed by Dionysos: Euripides has made the Athenians intelligent or intellectual; the god has been wholly convinced of Euripides' superiority to Aeschylus.

The chorus too is impressed by the powerful character of Euripides' attack. It does not fear that Aeschylus will disdain to reply. It fears that he will be unable to control his immense anger and indignation. Yet Aeschylus opens his reply in the most rational manner. Euripides had spoken only of the difference between himself and Aeschylus—of the opposition between his clarity, which made the Athenians more intelligent, and

Aeschylus' obscurantist obscurity. Aeschylus does not quarrel with Euripides' view of the opposition between the two poets or with his claim to have made the Athenians more intelligent. He merely begs Euripides to consider what is implied in his claim to be admirable as a poet; he reminds him in other words of the ground common to both, which is more fundamental than their difference. Euripides replies that the admirable poet makes the human beings in the cities better: Whether making men more intelligent, as Euripides did, is good depends on the answer to the question whether the intelligent man is necessarily a good citizen. Euripides and Aeschylus (to say nothing of Aristophanes) agree as to the highest criterion with a view to which poets must be judged. Euripides had been silent about that criterion: He had been silent about the political function of poetry, just as Socrates was entirely unconcerned with the city. Yet what Socrates could afford to do, if at his own peril, the poet who addresses the city can not. Aeschylus goes on to ask Euripides what he deserves to suffer if, far from making the citizens better, he has changed decent and noble men into altogether bad ones. Dionysos, who does not expect or wish Euripides to pronounce his own capital condemnation, answers the question for Euripides: The proper penalty for such a poet is death. It is hard to see how Euripides could have avoided giving the same answer. Yet it is also not easy to see how Dionysos, the soft and cowardly Dionysos, could give that answer unless we remember that in Hades he has undergone some rudimentary training in political responsibility. While he agrees with the two poets regarding the standard of poetic excellence, he has some doubts whether even Aeschylus has entirely lived up to it. Aeschylus rests his claim on the warlike and patriotic character of his plays, while admitting as a matter of course that noble poets may also teach mystic rites, abstention from bloodshed, the healing of diseases, oracles, the working of the fields, the seasons of harvesting, and the seed times; still, the divine Homer stands out for having taught orders of battle, deeds of bravery, and the arming of men. The outstanding example of what the Homeric-Aeschylean poetry achieved is Lamachos, whom we remember from the *Acharnians* and the *Peace* as the antagonist of our comic poet himself. By presenting lion-spirited warriors Aeschylus bred such warriors, whereas Euripides by presenting debased women filled women with unlawful desires. Euripides does not deny the charge that he failed to breed warriors. In order to deny the charge that he debased the audience, he refers to the goddess who inspired him and who admittedly is wholly alien to Aeschylus: Aphrodite, who belongs together with Peace

(*Acharnians* 989), the blessing that Dikaiopolis secured for himself with the help of Euripides, and who, together with Dionysos, is the sole concern of Aristophanes (Plato, *Symposium* 177<sup>e</sup>1-2). Yet it is not sufficient to oppose the divinity of *eros* to the claims of the city. Euripides can not deny that by presenting the power of Aphrodite he has weakened the resistance of noble women to unlawful love. Like all other poets, and not only poets, confronted with this kind of attack, he is compelled to have recourse to the fact that in presenting the overwhelming power of Aphrodite he merely stated the truth. Aeschylus, speaking on behalf of the city, flatly denies that this is a valid defense: It is the poet's duty to conceal evil; by presenting the bad in its glamour, he teaches evil, for he is the teacher of youth; the poets must say only decent things. Euripides is unable to contradict Aeschylus on this decisive point. He evades the issue by denying that Aeschylean grandiloquence is the proper way of teaching the decent things. Aeschylus reasonably replies that grand resolves and thoughts call for grand words and a grand appearance; Euripides has used low words and low appearances in order to arouse compassion for the tragic heroes. But in Euripides' view the arousing of compassion is a good thing. Just as Euripides evaded the question of whether it is not the poet's duty to conceal evil, Aeschylus evades the question of whether it is not the tragic poet's duty to arouse compassion. He goes on to show that Euripides has debased tragedy and therewith the Athenian citizenry; Aeschylus accuses Euripides of the same crime of which the Just Speech accused the Unjust Speech: He has made the citizens more concerned with speaking than with gymnastics and thus also destroyed the deference of the populace to their betters. Dionysos, however, is not so sure that the change for which Aeschylus makes Euripides responsible is altogether a change for the worse. This doubt only induces Aeschylus to make Euripides responsible for all evils that afflict present-day Athens. The Herakles-like Dionysos gladly grants that Athenian athletes are no longer what they were. He may have become doubtful of Euripides' superiority to Aeschylus; he surely has not become convinced of Aeschylus' superiority to Euripides. As for the chorus, there can be no doubt at all that it regards the contest as entirely undecided; in its view the decision will depend altogether on the second half of the contest, i.e., on the half in which will be discussed not the purpose of tragedy but its execution, the poetic or technical virtues and vices of the works of the two poets. That discussion can not be understood by an audience that is not highly sophisticated. The chorus assures the two poets that the Athenians, who always possess excel-

lent natures, are now also no longer untrained or unsophisticated. The chorus thus brings out the fact that the audience is Euripidean, rather than Aeschylean (cf. 954–59, 1069–76).

Hitherto, to repeat, the contest between the two poets has remained inconclusive, as inconclusive as the whipping contest. Aeschylus, who takes the side of the city, Ares, and anger (“waspishness”), has not been refuted by Euripides, who takes the side of the household, Aphrodite, and compassion. Nor has Euripides been refuted by Aeschylus. This ought not to shock anyone, for, to say nothing of the fact that we have not yet reached the end of the contest, in the contest between the two Speeches in the *Clouds*, which has some resemblance to the contest between the two poets, the Unjust Speech was even victorious. These two contests belong together; they differ from all other contests of this kind since their theme transcends the political issues proper, even those involved in the foundation of Cloudcuckootown or in the prosecution of Euripides. The contest between the two Speeches is misunderstood if it is not realized that the position taken by Socrates differs profoundly from the positions taken by the two Speeches. One thus begins to wonder whether the position of Aristophanes—or of Dionysos, Aristophanes’ teacher, who had originally not even thought of Aeschylus—does not differ from the positions of Aeschylus on the one hand and of Euripides on the other. The mere fact that Dionysos is a spectator of the verbal contest, rather than a participant in it, could induce one to raise that question. Certain it is that neither of the two poets is simply refuted by the other. The position of each has its strong and its weak sides. Aeschylus does not give their due to Aphrodite and to compassion; Euripides does not give their due to the city or warlike patriotism and to the need for concealing the unwholesome truth. Perhaps in Aristophanes’ view there are two kinds of heterogeneous needs that must be satisfied by tragedy but that can not be satisfied except by two different kinds of tragedy. The fact that the kind of need fulfilled by Aeschylus is primary does not by itself prove that the kind of need fulfilled by Euripides is of lower rank. This would mean that Aristophanes is as little a partisan of Aeschylus as is his Dionysos. Aeschylus, full of wrath and given to indignation, fosters warlike patriotism and conceals the glamour of unlawful *eros*. No one can seriously doubt that warlike patriotism and stern self-control, to say nothing here of the worship of the ancestral gods, are the pillars of the city. Yet, as we have seen in the *Wasps* and elsewhere, waspishness becomes a danger if not to the citizen then surely to man; that which edifies the city is in need of a corrective.

The waspish jurymen are appeased by compassion and by laughter (see above, p. 120). Aeschylean tragedy needs as its supplement both Euripidean tragedy and Aristophanean comedy. Jocularly expressed, Aristophanes competes with Euripides but not with Aeschylus, or Aristophanes is an enemy of Euripides. The fact that Euripides and Aristophanes belong together over against Aeschylus is obviously compatible with the possibility that Aristophanes regarded Aeschylus as a greater poet than Euripides; whether he in fact did so can become clear only from the second half of the poets' contest. Nor can we exclude the possibility that the statement of the fundamental problem that is suggested by the first half of that contest is provisional, i.e., that what Aristophanes has in mind is the heterogeneity of the two functions of dramatic poetry, rather than the impossibility of fulfilling these functions by a single dramatist or in a single drama. After all, he himself claims that his dramas fulfill both functions, the edifying as well as the corrective one. Perhaps all good dramatists fulfill both functions, if each in his own way. One may wonder whether the silence on Sophocles is not a pointer in this direction. Let us also not forget the bond that links Ares and Aphrodite.

Euripides turns at once to the examination of Aeschylus' prologues, which he blames for their obscurity. That obscurity, he contends, is partly due to tautology, i.e., to bombast. He discusses one example consisting of three verses at fairly great length. Although he asserts that each of these verses contains many mistakes, he does not discuss at all the central verse, which is recited twice. Aeschylus' justification of the first verse implies in Dionysos' view a blasphemy. His justification of the third verse satisfies Dionysos, but the god is no less impressed by Euripides' rebuttal despite the fact that, as he admits, he does not understand it. There follows a very brief discussion of a second example that in Euripides' view suffers likewise from tautology, but this criticism is refuted by the consideration that Euripides did not take into account the difficulty of talking to the dead. This victory of Aeschylus induces him to turn to the examination of Euripides' prologues. Euripides had claimed that he does not make the mistake of repeating himself or of padding. Aeschylus tacitly confirms the justice of his claim (cf. 1184-85). After having made one successful attempt to apply Euripides' micrologism to Euripides' own prologues, he shows with the gods' help that Euripides' manner of building his sentences permits one to complete those sentences easily with such phrases as "he lost his flask." More generally stated, he shows that while Aeschylus' prologues may be obscure, Euripides' clear prologues suffer

from monotony. After Aeschylus has succeeded to Dionysos' dismay in three cases, Euripides does not give up the fight, but swears for the first time by Demeter. Aeschylus succeeds three more times. Up to this point Aeschylus has examined altogether seven Euripidean passages; one might find that the fourth of these passages (1217-19) contains Euripides' reply to Aeschylus' criticism of the first (1182). When Euripides recites a verse of his that Aeschylus can not complete with "he lost his flask," Dionysos from whim or conviction conceals the defeat of Euripides in this part of the contest and asks him to turn to the examination of Aeschylus' songs. Aeschylus could seem to have had a slight edge as regards the prologues.

Euripides declares that he will show Aeschylus to be a bad lyrical poet. The chorus wonders how Euripides can succeed in proving his point, given the manifest supremacy of Aeschylus in this respect; it did not express the same feelings regarding the prologues. Furthermore, owing to Euripides' eagerness to win, Aeschylus has the last word in the section devoted to the songs, just as he had the last word regarding the prologues; as a matter of fact, Aeschylus has the last word in all parts of the contest. All the more striking is Dionysos' failure to proclaim Aeschylus as the victor; in fact he fails to pass judgment on the superiority of either poet. He abruptly commands both poets to stop the songs. Aeschylus too has had enough of the songs, for he wishes to lead Euripides to the scales on which the two poets' verses are to be weighed: This weighing alone can decide the contest between them. This is the first time in the second half of the contest that Aeschylus determines the subject of a part of the contest. The weighing of the tragedies was indeed provided for from the beginning (796-802). Yet Euripides claimed that he had changed the character of tragedy as he had taken it over from Aeschylus by reducing its weight or heaviness (939-41). Aeschylus draws the conclusion that the weighing of the two poets' verses will settle the contest in his favor: Even Dionysos must see that Aeschylus' verses press down the scale. Dionysos accepts the proposal. The chorus is amazed by the novel conceit of deciding a contest between poets by comparing the weight of their verses: No one else—except Aeschylus? except Aristophanes?—would have thought of it; surely clever men go to all kinds of toil. As in the preceding parts of the contest, Euripides speaks first. In this final part of the contest a decision is quickly reached; three times each poet puts one of his verses on the scales, and three times Aeschylus wins. It may suffice to mention the second example. Euripides' verse declares that Persuasion—the goddess of Lysistrata (*Lysistrata* 203)—has no other temple than Speech, but in

Dionysos' view Persuasion is something light and lacks intelligence; Aeschylus' verse however declares that Death is the only god who does not long for presents but, as even Euripides can not deny, Death is the heaviest evil. One might find that Euripides was bound to lose once heaviness became the standard of excellence, for he worships Ether above all (cf. 1352-53). Aeschylus is at least as certain of having been victorious as he ever was before. In the only part of the contest that leads to a clear decision intelligible to the meanest capacity, Aeschylus undoubtedly wins. He proves to be the weightier of the two poets on the lightest or flimsiest ground—on a ground that he had wisely chosen. Yet the chorus remains silent. Dionysos, however, can not remain silent. Aristophanes pays him a great compliment by making him refuse to decide the contest in favor of Aeschylus, for even assuming that the god had become wholly bewildered by the bulk of the poets' exchange, it required a considerable effort to remember that bewilderment after the wholly unbewildering outcome of the final and utterly simple part of the contest. Dionysos refuses to decide the contest on the ground that he wishes to remain on friendly terms with both poets, for he regards the one as wise and the other as enjoyable. In order to remain on friendly terms with both poets, the god leaves it open which of the two predicates he assigns to which of the two poets. While a case can be made for either view (cf. 916-18), we are inclined to believe that Dionysos regards Aeschylus as wiser than Euripides, but Euripides as more enjoyable than Aeschylus. For, to say no more of the difference between the edifying and the corrective, Aeschylus proved to be clearly superior to Euripides in weightiness, and weightiness as such is not pleasant, as is sufficiently shown by the example of death. Besides, we find in both the *Frogs* and the *Thesmophoriazusai* sufficient proof of the imperfect character of Euripides' wisdom. Lastly, to say that Euripides is superior in wisdom to Aeschylus would amount to denying that the gods are (cf. *Thesmoph.* 450-51). However this may be, it is wisest to leave the matter at saying that the contest between the two poets remains undecided, as undecided as the whipping contest between Dionysos and Xanthias.

The contest for divinity, which could not be settled by whipping, was settled by recourse to Pluton. Similarly, the contest for supremacy in tragedy, which could not be settled by examination of the tragedies of the two poets or by Dionysos, is settled thanks to the intervention of Pluton. If Pluton had not intervened, the natural conclusion from the contest between the poets would have been that Aeschylus should remain in

possession of the tragic throne; this would have been in perfect harmony with Dionysos' desire to bring Euripides back to the living. It is this simple solution that is prevented by Pluton's intervention. Pluton makes the fulfillment of Dionysos' desire to bring back a tragic poet dependent on his deciding the contest between the two tragic poets. He says that Dionysos will have descended to Hades in vain if he does not pronounce in favor of one of the two poets: To bring back, say, Euripides means to pronounce in favor of Euripides or to declare him, and not Aeschylus, worthy of the tragic throne. Pluton in effect declares that Dionysos can not choose one of the two poets according to his mere whim or pleasure; he must act responsibly. Yet Dionysos proved unable to prefer either poet on grounds of poetic excellence. He begins to overcome his predicament by explaining the purpose of his descent to Hades to the two poets in the following manner: He came down, he now declares, so that the city, having been saved, could conduct its choruses; accordingly he will take back to Athens that one of the two poets who can give the city good advice, i.e., who can bring about the salvation of the city and thus secure the external conditions for Athens' theatrical excellence. This means that Dionysos will pronounce his judgment not on poetic but on political grounds. He had not thought of the city when he went down in the guise of Herakles in order to steal Euripides. Yet he was compelled to reveal his identity and his design to Pluton in order to put an end to his being whipped; he realized his dependence on the community to which he belongs, the community of the gods, and thus acquired some gravity; there was no longer any question of running away stealthily from Hades with Euripides. Furthermore, Pluton compels him to act as arbiter, i.e., impartially, in the poets' contest and thus to pay attention to Euripides' defects—in particular his defects as an educator of human beings in the cities; he surely realized that he could not bring back Euripides without giving an account of his choice of Euripides, an account that would have to be politically defensible. Having learned through the whipping contest the importance of the community, he eventually considers the community in trying to decide the poets' contest. Precisely in Hades, where poetry is honored more highly than in Athens, Dionysos realizes what is meant by the city being the condition of poetry.

The contest for divinity is not decided as long as it is to be decided with a view to the primary criterion (insensitivity to pain), but it is decided as soon as another criterion is applied (recognition of a god by a fellow god). Similarly, the contest for supremacy in tragic poetry is not decided as

long as it is to be decided with a view to the primary criterion (poetic excellence), but it is decided as soon as another criterion is applied (goodness in giving political advice). Furthermore, the contest for divinity called for a change of arbiters; the second arbiter (Pluton) settled the contest because he, in contradistinction to the first, had the required competence. In the case of the contest of the poets, however, no change of arbiters takes place; it is somehow taken for granted that just as Dionysos is competent to judge who is the best tragic poet, he is also competent to judge political wisdom. Besides, one must wonder whether one tragic poet is necessarily preferable to another because he is better at giving political advice; if this doubt is justified, the contest of the poets remains undecided; the analogon in the contest for divinity would be that one does not know whether Dionysos or Xanthias is a god. Lastly, the comparison of the two contests induces one to suggest that the contest for divinity is decided on the ground that Dionysos is more useful to the city than Xanthias.

Dionysos asks the two poets in the first place what they think about Alkibiades, for the city has difficulty in reaching a decision about him. Aeschylus wishes first to know what the city thinks about Alkibiades; he seems to think that one can not give advice to the city if one does not know what the city wishes. Dionysos tells him that the city longs for Alkibiades, hates him, and wishes to have him. Thereafter Euripides speaks out clearly against Alkibiades: Alkibiades may be helpful to the fatherland in the long run, but he will first do it great harm; he is good at taking care of himself, but for the city he is ineffective. Dionysos praises his answer and then asks Aeschylus for his view. Aeschylus speaks out in favor of Alkibiades: It is best not to rear a lion in the city, but once one has been reared, one must be subservient to its manners. Dionysos does not praise Aeschylus' answer, which is more in accordance with the wishes of the city than Euripides'. Nevertheless he is again unable to decide: One of the poets has spoken wisely, the other clearly. This result is not surprising; Dionysos from the beginning regarded the question about Alkibiades as only his first question. He now addresses his last question to the poets. Since it has remained uncertain whether Alkibiades can save the city, he asks the poets of what ways of saving the city they dispose. Euripides, who seems to regard Dionysos' expectation as preposterous, reveals a preposterous way, befitting a comedian, of winning a naval battle. Thereupon Aeschylus intervenes, saying that he knows a way and wishes to state it. Euripides is thus compelled to give a serious answer: We must distrust

the citizens whom we now trust and entrust the affairs of the city to those to whom we do not now entrust them, for since the present policy has led to disaster, it stands to reason that the opposite policy will lead to salvation. His proposal recalls the one made by the chorus in the parabasis (717-37). Dionysos is greatly pleased with it and only wonders whether it is Euripides' own; the poet assures him that it is his own, while the laughable proposal that he had stated first stemmed from his collaborator or servant Kephisophon; he thus disowns the laughable proposal that he stated before Aeschylus' intervention put him under pressure. Dionysos then asks Aeschylus for his opinion. Aeschylus asks again for some information: Does the city at present entrust its affairs to decent men? When he learns that it does not, while it also dislikes being ruled by bad men, he sees no way of saving it. Dionysos urges him to find a way of saving the city if he wishes to return to the living. Aeschylus, who is obviously anxious to return to the living, replies that he will give his advice "there," but refuses to give it in Hades. On Dionysos' insistence, however, he gives his advice in Hades: The Athenians must regard the land of their enemies as their own and their own land as their enemies', their navy as their wealth and their wealth as their handicap. He advises the Athenians to return to the policy of Perikles or of Themistokles. Each poet thus gave two different answers to Dionysos' final question, but while Euripides' first answer was laughable, Aeschylus' first answer was openly despondent; each poet gave his second answer, which is compatible with action, when he was put under some pressure. Dionysos has some doubt whether the policy recommended by Aeschylus is feasible under the circumstances. He surely does not praise Aeschylus' advice as he praised Euripides' advice. Pluton urges him to make his decision. Dionysos declares that he will choose that poet whom his soul prefers. While everyone waits silently in the highest tension for the god's verdict, Euripides, driven by his eagerness to win and to return to the living, can not remain silent. He tells the god as it were that he has no freedom to choose, but is bound to choose him: In making his choice Dionysos must remember the gods by whom he has sworn to bring Euripides home. This is too much for Dionysos. Euripides is the last man who can demand that Dionysos, or any other god or man, keep his oath. The god quotes from a verse of Euripides that says, "the tongue has sworn but not the mind," and declares that he chooses Aeschylus or judges him to be the victor. To Euripides' outbursts about the god's base action he replies with other apposite quotations, more or less literal, from the poet's works. Euripides has been beaten with his

own weapons. At first glance it might seem that Dionysos simply could not withstand the temptation to outsmart the smart Euripides, or that his decision is due to a mere whim. Yet the decision in the poets' contest is as little merely whimsical as the decision in the whipping contest. What was at stake in the whipping contest was the difference between gods and men; gods must be essentially different from men for the sake of the sacredness of oaths (cf. *Clouds* 395-97). Euripides can not have it both ways: denying the gods that avenge perjury (or denying that perjury is sinful) and expecting that others keep their sworn promises to him. Dionysos justly punishes Euripides for his denial of the gods by awarding the prize to Aeschylus. This is not to deny that the god punishes the poet for destroying the basis of the sacredness of oaths by himself committing an act of perjury: He acts wickedly indeed, but justly like the Clouds (*Clouds* 1462). The irresponsible playboy has become altogether edifying. One might question the justice of Dionysos' action on the ground that one can not hold a poet responsible for the utterances of his characters: To hold Euripides responsible for his Hippolytos' saying "the tongue has sworn but not the mind," without even considering the context of the utterance, is about as fair as asserting that according to Aristophanes Zeus does not even exist, since he makes his Socrates say it. Nor must we forget that Dionysos has broken a solemn promise before (526-29, 586-89, 591-601).

After Dionysos has annihilated Euripides, Pluton invites Dionysos and Aeschylus to take a meal in his house before they depart. In their absence the chorus, which never speaks for Aristophanes, sums up the result of the contest by contrasting the perfectly sensible man who is blessed and goes home again for the benefit of his fellow citizens and his kinsmen and friends with the insane man who, sitting with Socrates, engages in vain talk, having discarded music and forsaken the highest part of the tragic art. In order not to misunderstand this song entirely, i.e., in order not to mistake this utterance of the chorus for an utterance of Aristophanes himself, we must remind ourselves that it was not Socrates from whom Euripides learned to uphold the claims of Aphrodite, and that it was not Aeschylus as he presents himself in the *Frogs* from whom Aristophanes learned to be a champion of peace. The view expressed by the chorus and conveyed in a manner by the play as a whole is the Aeschylean or chthonic view, a partial view and in fact a low view: the view belonging to Hades. One must not forget the high or heavenly view as presented especially in the *Peace*. Then one will realize how strongly the case for

corrective, as distinguished from edifying, tragedy is stated even in Hades.

Pluton, Dionysos, and Aeschylus reappear. Pluton bids farewell to Aeschylus and urges him to save "our city" with good counsels and to tell some obnoxious Athenians to come quickly to him by committing suicide if they do not wish to be brought down by Pluton's violent action: Hades is the right place for undesirable people. Aeschylus replies that he will do what Pluton told him to do and urges the god in his turn to give Aeschylus' throne to Sophocles, who is second only to Aeschylus, and to keep it for him if he should ever return: Aeschylus hopes never to return to Hades. He goes on to urge Pluton to prevent the scoundrel, liar, and buffoon, i.e., Euripides, from ever occupying the tragic throne. We note that Aeschylus does not call Euripides a boaster (cf. 909). The last word on Euripides is entirely Aeschylus': Not only does Pluton not promise Aeschylus that he will execute his last will and testament; Dionysos himself is altogether silent in this last scene. Euripides is sufficiently punished by being left in Hades to which Aeschylus, despite his hope, will have to return sooner or later: He will have to die a second time.<sup>85</sup> Given the fact that Euripides is already dead, one may find that his punishment is less severe than Socrates'; no one will interfere with his exhibiting his extraordinary conceits to the large multitude of his admirers. We have seen why it is just that his punishment should be less severe than Socrates'. Pluton consoles Aeschylus for his silence about the poet's last word by asking the chorus to send him forth with his own songs. Nothing is said of the whereabouts of Xanthias, who may be left behind in Hades as the dung beetle was left behind in heaven, or about who is to carry Dionysos' luggage. The chorus prays to the nether gods to grant a good journey to Aeschylus and good thoughts of great goods to the city, and it intimates its hope for peace.

The *Frogs* presents the education of Aristophanes' educator from an unqualified admiration for Euripides to a preference for Aeschylus. This education takes place in Hades. Dionysos' not altogether successful descent to a quite Athenian Hades contrasts with Trygaios' altogether successful ascent to heaven, an ascent that is successful because of the conflict between the Greek gods and the cosmic gods. Dionysos' conversion is decisively prepared by his blunder of having descended to Hades in the guise of Herakles, for that blunder leads to the whipping contest that is so similar and so dissimilar to the contest regarding wisdom between Aeschylus and Euripides.

82. Diels, *Vorsokratiker*, 7th edition, fr. 15.

83. Cf. Plato *Theaetetus* 180<sup>c</sup>7–<sup>d</sup>5.

84. Cf. *Thesmoph.* 383–432; Xenophon *Memorabilia* III 4.

85. Cf. Xenophon *Oeconomicus* end.